DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 449 529 CS 217 418

TITLE	Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Power of Nonviolence. [Lesson Plan].
INSTITUTION	National Endowment for the Humanities (NFAH), Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	MCI WorldCom, Arlington, VA.; Council of the Great City Schools, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	10p.; Small print in the column of text on the right side of the document may not reproduce well.
AVAILABLE FROM	Full text at: http://edsitement.neh.gov/lessonplans/mlking.html.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Civil Rights; Class Activities; English Instruction; Intermediate Grades; *Language Arts; Lesson Plans; Literature Appreciation; Secondary Education; United States History
IDENTIFIERS	Gandhi (Mahatma); *King (Martin Luther Jr); *Nonviolence

ABSTRACT

This lesson plan introduces students in grades 6-8 to Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence and the teachings of Mohandas K. Gandhi that influenced King's views. After considering the political impact of this philosophy, students explore its relevance to personal life. In these 6 lessons students will: (1) examine the philosophy of nonviolence developed by Martin Luther King, Jr.; (2) consider how this philosophy translated into practice during the Civil Rights Movement; (3) explore the relationship between King's teachings on nonviolence and those of Mohandas K. Gandhi; and (4) reflect on the relevance of nonviolence to one's personal conduct in everyday life. Intended for grades 6-8, the plan notes subject areas covered (literature, world and U.S. history), time required to complete the lesson, skills used and taught in the lesson, and the standards developed by professional associations or governments that are related to the lesson. Activities to extend the lesson, and further resources conclude the lesson plan. (SR)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 449 529

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Power of Nonviolence. [Lesson Plan].

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CS 217 418

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Power of Nonviolence

Photograph of Martin Luther King, Jr. courtesy of the National Archives.

BACK TO
Home
Lesson Plans
SEARCH EDSITEMENT

Introduction

This lesson introduces students to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence and the teachings of Mohandas K. Gandhi that influenced King's views. After considering the political impact of this philosophy, students explore its relevance to personal life.

Learning Objectives

(1) To examine the philosophy of nonviolence developed by Martin Luther King, Jr. (2) To consider how this philosophy translated into practice during the Civil Rights Movement. (3) To explore the relationship between King's teachings on nonviolence and those of Mohandas K. Gandhi. (4) To reflect on the relevance of nonviolence to one's personal conduct in everyday life.

Lesson Plan

Guiding Question: What was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolence and can we follow his example today?

1 Set the stage for this lesson by having students read a brief selection of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s writings on nonviolence, available through EDSITEment at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project website:

- Nonviolence and Racial Justice
  (http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/papers/vol4/570206.004-Nonviolence_and_Racial_Justice.htm)
  This 1957 article, based on King's experience during the Montgomery bus boycott, includes a review of race relations in the United States (paragraphs 1-7) and a concise summary of King's views on nonviolence (paragraphs 8-16).
- Letter from Birmingham Jail
  (http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/frequentdocs/birmingham.html)
  King wrote this famous article in 1963 while imprisoned for leading a nonviolent campaign against segregation in Birmingham, Alabama. He explains and defends his tactics in paragraphs 5-29.

SUBJECT AREAS

Literature: American

Literature: Essay

Art and Culture: Philosophy

History: U.S.: African American

History: U.S.: Civil Rights

History: World: Human Rights

GRADE LEVELS

6-8

TIME REQUIRED

One to two class periods

SKILLS

information gathering and analysis
critical thinking
interpretation
public speaking and presentation
Internet skills

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- As an aid to discussion, you might also provide students with " A Glossary of Nonviolence " (http://www.thekingcenter.com/glossary.html), prepared by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change . See in particular the definitions for "Six Principles of Nonviolence" and "Six Steps of Nonviolent Social Change." (The Center's website is accessible through the " Links " section of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project website on EDSITEment.)

2 Begin your class discussion by looking at photographs of nonviolent protest during the civil rights era. Ask students to compare the practice of nonviolence, shown in the photographs, with the philosophy King outlines. To what extent do such images illustrate the concept of nonviolence as King explains it? Are there aspects of his philosophy that cannot be captured in a photograph? (For example, motive, moral commitment, historical context.) By the same token, do such photographs reveal any aspects of nonviolent action that King's philosophy overlooks? (For example, physical danger, explosive emotion, violence.) Images available through EDSITEment include:

- Lunch Counter Sit-In
  (http://www.midsouth.rr.com/civilrights/it56.html)
  Part of an interactive tour of civil rights history at the National Civil Rights Museum website, which is accessible through the " Links " section of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project website, this image shows opponents of integration pouring sugar and ketchup on demonstrators protesting the exclusion of blacks from a drugstore lunch counter.
- Civil Rights Campaign, Birmingham, Alabama, 1963
  (http://www.seattletimes.com/mlk/movement/PT/police_dogs_1963.html)
  The Seattle Times has produced an online exhibit about Martin Luther King, Jr. , also accessible through the " Links " section of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project website, that includes a photo history of the civil rights movement where you will find this vivid image of a police dog attacking a demonstrator.
- March on Washington, 1963
  (http://media.nara.gov/media/images/27/4/27-0309a.gif)
  The Digital Classroom website on EDSITEment provides access to more than eighty images of the mass demonstration where Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech, including this image of demonstrators marching peacefully with picket signs.

3 Follow your comparison of nonviolence in theory and practice with a class discussion of King's writings. Focus on the moral framework of King's thought and the dynamic element within nonviolence that led King to describe it as "soul force." Ask students:

- How does King characterize the choice between violence and nonviolence in the struggle for freedom? What does he predict violence will lead to? What does he promise nonviolence will lead to? Looking back, was he a reliable forecaster?
- How does nonviolence work? What are the stages of the process, as King describes it? What role does "tension" play in this process? To what extent is violence part of the process? How does public awareness contribute to making nonviolence a success? Would it work in a society without freedom of speech and freedom of the press?
- What kind of person takes part in nonviolent action, according to Dr. King? To what extent are they fighters? To what extent peacemakers? What part do politics and religion play in their thinking? What

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions (more)
6. Power, Authority, and Governance (more)
10. Civic Ideals and Practices (more)

National Standards for Civics and Government

1. What are civic life, politics, and government? (more)
5. What are the roles of the citizen in American democracy? (more)

View your state's standards

part do hatred and love play in their decision to act? Can you see yourself joining in a nonviolent protest?

4 In his writings on nonviolence, Dr. King frequently acknowledged the influence of Mohandas K. Gandhi, who led nonviolent campaigns against racial discrimination in South Africa and later against British colonial rule in India. Introduce students to this important social activist and compare his concept of nonviolent action -- satyagraha (*sah -yah- grah-hah*) -- with King's.

- For background on Gandhi, visit the Ministry of External Affairs of the Government of India website, accessible through the SARAI (South Asia Resource Access on the Internet) website on EDSITEment. The " Mahatma Gandhi: A Retrospective " exhibit on this site includes a " Chronological Sketch ," a two-part history of Gandhi's " Life and Times ," a " Photo Gallery ," and selections from his writings.
- Have students review the selection of Gandhi's statements on " Satyagraha ," focusing on these two short passages:

  In the application of Satyagraha, I discovered, in the earliest stages, that pursuit of Truth did not admit of violence being inflicted on one's opponent, but that he must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy. For what appears to be truth to one may appear to be error to the other. And patience means self-suffering. So the doctrine came to mean vindication of Truth, not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but one's own self.

  Satyagraha and its off-shoots, non-cooperation and civil resistance, are nothing but new names for the law of suffering.

  . . .

  The movement of nonviolent non-cooperation has nothing in common with the historical struggles for freedom in the West. It is not based on brute force or hatred. It does not aim at destroying the tyrant. It is a movement of self-purification. It therefore seeks to convert the tyrant.... The essence of nonviolent technique is that it seeks to liquidate antagonisms but not the antagonists themselves. In nonviolent fight you have, to a certain measure, to conform to the tradition and conventions of the system you are pitted against. Avoidance of all relationship with the opposing power, therefore, can never be a Satyagrahi's object but transformation or purification of that relationship.

5 How do Gandhi's ideas compare to Dr. King's? Where does King seem to follow Gandhi's teachings, and where does he differ? Point out their agreement that nonviolence succeeds by transforming the relationship between antagonists and that it's strength lies in the individual's commitment to truth and justice. Yet Gandhi seems to emphasize a need for personal suffering in the practice of nonviolence, a posture that is somewhat less militant than King's call to self-sacrifice. And there is a similar difference between Gandhi's belief that nonviolence achieves its goals through patience and non-cooperation and King's belief that it takes "creative tension" and a degree of confrontation to accomplish change. Remind students as you explore these two philosophies that your aim is not to decide who is right and who is wrong. Both Gandhi and King proved their ideas in practice by leading nonviolent social revolutions that shattered the law of oppression in their countries. While admiring them both, however, one can still recognize that they offer two approaches to the practice of nonviolence, one rooted in opposition, the other in protest.

6 Conclude this lesson by asking students to consider how nonviolence might be relevant to their own lives. To what degree can we practice this philosophy of social change at a personal level? Explore this question by staging a "talk show" in class. Have two students play Gandhi and King as the day's guests, and take the role of talk show host yourself. You might focus your discussion on violence in school, antagonism between groups of students, or interpersonal conflict. Have students in the "audience" describe situations in their lives that illustrate these issues, and have your "guests" offer practical suggestions for handling them. How do ideas like non-cooperation and creative tension, suffering and self-sacrifice translate into everyday actions? Follow-up this discussion by having students write a short essay on the philosophy of nonviolence and what we can learn from it today.

Extending the Lesson

As a companion to Gandhi and King, have students investigate the career of Nelson Mandela, who led the fight against apartheid in South Africa and finally emerged from more than a quarter century in prison to become the president of his country. Excerpts from Mandela's autobiography, Long Walk to Freedom (http://www.obs-us.com:80/obs/english/books/Mandela/Mandela.html) are accessible through the African Studies WWW website on EDSITEment, which also provides a link to the African National Conference Home Page (http://www.anc.org.za/) where you can access an Archive of historical documents on the struggle against apartheid and a Mandela Page (http://www.anc.org.za/people/mandela/) which offers further background and a selection of his writings. Nonviolence was at the foundation of Mandela's political philosophy, but in the course of his career he came to accept the necessity of armed resistance. You might explore the interaction between these tendencies in Mandela's thinking, and consider what his eventual triumph, through a nonviolent transformation of government, suggests about the power of ideas.